

Jacob's 'Final Exam' in the School of Faith

Genesis 32.22-32

Jacob's famous wrestling match with God taught him that in order to be strong in his faith, he must be rid of his self-sufficiency. His meeting with Esau looms, but now he has a new name, Israel, and a new limp – a reminder for him to *completely* trust in the Lord.

A fight, a dislocated hip, and a new name

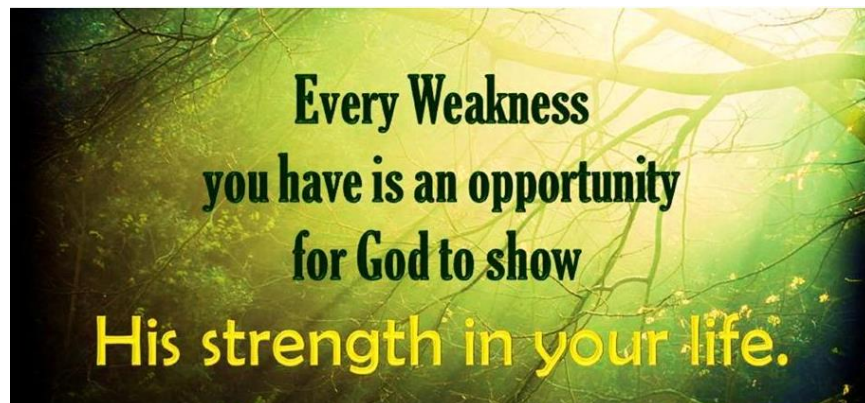
- Alone, Jacob wrestles all night against a mysterious foe.
- Injured, Jacob asks his supernatural opponent for a blessing.
- Jacob becomes 'Israel' and realizes he has been with God.
- He goes on his way, limping physically, but strong in his faith.

A Parable for the Nation of Israel

- Israel will face earthly foes more powerful than themselves.
- Victory won't come through *her* strength, but *God's*.
- Israel will struggle with God, but emerge with His blessing.

Lessons for the Growing Christian

- *God's presence may often bring unexpected difficulties.*
- *God may 'cripple' self-sufficient believers to bless them.*
- *When trust in self is 'crippled,' we become bold in faith.*



1. Genesis 32.22-32 recounts Jacob's 'wrestling match' with God, but it begins with him taking his family and possessions across the Jabbok River (22-24a). Why do you think he did this? How might this have been in preparation for him meeting his brother Esau (which he feared)? Why might he have wanted to be stay alone that night?
2. Unexpectedly, Jacob is embroiled in a 'wrestling match' – but let's call it what it was, a fight! The man (in Jacob's eyes) who confronted him could not defeat him. Why? We know that this was actually God, so although Jacob was no slouch (see 29.10), there had to be a reason God did not defeat him. What did God want him to learn through this event?
3. The text says Jacob's opponent 'touched' his thigh, dislocating it. How would this injury affect his ability to wrestle? What did Jacob realize about his foe at this juncture? What did Jacob do? Why did his rival say, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking?" In Jacob's refusal to let go until he received a blessing, what is he showing he realizes about his foe?
4. In blessing Jacob, God changes his name. The name *Jacob* had reflected him being a *supplanter* and *deceiver*. The name *Israel* (which means *God perseveres/contends*) would always serve to remind people of this event, when Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. What would the idea that 'God fights' coupled with the blessing of Jacob signify for the nation of Israel?
5. There is rich irony in this scene. Jacob prevails but ends up with a debilitating injury, and limps away with a blessing. Was this a defeat or a victory? It is indisputable that Jacob was changed, and this is a direct result of him being with God (he named the place Penuel = *face of God*). Do you see God's 'severe mercy' in His dealing with Jacob? Can you see God's similar 'mercy' in 2 Cor. 12.7-10? Can you see this 'mercy' in your own life?